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Going different ways?

Right-wing parties and the immigrant issue in Denmark and Sweden

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Abstract

This article analyses centre-right parties' attitudes and positions on immigration and integration in Denmark and Sweden. Despite being socio-economically and culturally similar, there are also some significant political and structural differences which help to explain why immigration has played a much more prominent role in Danish politics compared to Swedish politics. The article argues that this can be explained with reference to, on the one hand, the stability of bloc party politics and, on the other, the extent to which centre-right parties have exploited 'the immigration issue' as a profiling tool. The findings suggest that even though Denmark has adopted a much tougher stance on immigration and integration compared to Sweden, the political climate in the latter has also undergone a number of changes in the past decade which has allowed for centre-right and radical right parties to use immigration to challenge the prevailing cross-party consensus on the issue by suggesting a more market oriented integration policy.

Key words: Denmark, immigration, integration, Radical right-wing parties, Right-wing parties, Sweden.

Introduction

There are several reasons to expect that Sweden and Denmark would approach questions relating to immigration and integration in a similar fashion. Both countries were for a long time relatively homogenous nation-states in terms of ethnicity (or at least perceived themselves in this way). Both countries also have large, universal welfare states combined with a highly regulated labour market making the job opportunities for low-skilled workers quite limited. During the 1970s and 1980s, there were also many similarities in terms of migration and migrant policies, which was based on a broad, cross-party consensus. However, by the early 1990s, the two countries started to diverge significantly as both Danish policy and the rhetoric surrounding it became remarkably more restrictive compared to Sweden, especially with regards to immigration.

The main argument of this article suggests that the explanation for this divergence should be sought in the diverging positions of centre-right-parties in the two countries. The more restrictionist position of the Danish centre right- parties has been central in turning immigration and integration into a highly salient and contested policy issue which has also contributed to significant policy changes. Elements of this development can also be found in Sweden, but the changes in the position of the Swedish right and subsequent policy changes have generally gone in a different direction than Denmark .

These diverging positions of centre right parties can further be explained by looking at the coalition incentives of the centre right parties in the two countries. As we explore in the paper, these differences relate to differences in the composition and strength of the right-wing blocs in the two countries. The Danish centre right-parties have traditionally been much stronger electorally than their Swedish counterparts but as a coalition bloc, also significantly more unstable. Consequently, the Danish centre-right has had to rely, and sometimes co-operate with, radical right-wing parties which has placed the two dominant right-wing parties in Denmark – the Liberals

(Venstre) and the Conservatives – in a different strategic position from their Swedish counterparts, the Liberal party (Folkpartiet) and especially the Conservatives (Moderaterna).

The main argument of this article thus strongly supports the overall focus of this special issue (Bale, 2008), that is, understanding the policy position of centre right-wing parties is crucial in understanding the development of policy with regard to immigration and integration and the rhetoric surrounding it in the two countries.

The argument of the paper is constructed in several steps. We start by presenting the composition and strength of the right-wing blocs in the two countries. The difference between the two countries in this regard is a key factor in order to understand the development in immigration politicsⁱ in the two countries. We also lay out the similarities in the societal context with regard to immigration and proceed to describe the similarities between the two countries until the early 1990s. We then turn to an analysis of how the centre-right parties and their positions have shaped both policy and rhetoric with regard to immigration politics in the two countries during the 1990s causing the divergence between the two countries.

The nature of political competition in Scandinavia

In the Scandinavian context, political contestation has traditionally revolved around competition between the bourgeois parties on the right, or the bourgeois bloc, and the strong Social Democratic parties on the left.ⁱⁱ However, in both countries, the more centrist of the right-wing parties - the Social Liberals in Denmark and the Centre Party in Sweden - have often supported the Social Democrats.

In Denmark, the major right-wing parties are the Liberals, a former agrarian party which has developed into a mainstream right-wing party, and the Conservatives, which is a traditional conservative party with an upper-class background. In practical politics it has often been

difficult to distinguish the two parties from each other, though there has been a tendency for the larger of the two to be more centrist while the smaller has had a more pronounced right-wing profile. The third traditional right-wing party is the Social Liberal Party, which is a centre-right wing party, coincidentally also with an agrarian history. The Social Liberals have, however, been more left-wing when it comes to certain non-economic issues such as defence policy. Since 1973, radical right-wing parties have also been represented in the Danish parliament. The Progress Party held seats until the 2001 election, while the Danish People's Party, which broke away from the Progress Party in 1995, emerged as the major radical right wing party in the 1998 election.ⁱⁱⁱ

In Sweden, the bourgeois bloc has historically contained the traditional Conservative Party (Moderaterna), the traditional Agrarian Centre Party (Centerpartiet), and the Liberals (Folkpartiet)^{iv}. In the 1991 election, the Christian Democrats gained representation for the first time which increased the bourgeois bloc to four parties. From 1991 to 1994, the radical right-wing party, New Democracy (Ny Demokrati), was represented in the Swedish parliament, but otherwise Sweden has had no radical right-wing represented on a national level.

The difference in representation of, especially, radical right-wing parties is an obvious point that distinguishes the two countries. However, two further differences are worth mentioning, first, that the right-wing bloc has always been stronger in Denmark. With the exception of a few shorter periods, the bourgeois bloc in Denmark has controlled the majority in the Danish parliament. On the occasions where the Social Democrats have led governments this has been primarily due to the Social Liberals 'defecting' from the bourgeois camp. In Sweden, bourgeois majorities have been the exception to the rule and have always been followed by Social Democratic majorities. Second, the point of gravity in the Danish right-wing bloc has always been towards the two sister parties, the Liberals and the Conservatives, which have been much stronger than the Social Liberals. In Sweden, the centre-right parties have most of the time been equal to the

Conservatives in strength (Arter, 1999). In the 1990s, these differences constituted different strategic contexts for the right-wing parties with regard to the immigration issue. These background settings thus help to explain why Danish and Swedish immigration politics began to diverge in the 1990s.

The Societal Context

The two countries share many societal similarities which could lead one to expect strong similarities in the way that centre-right parties have responded to, and positioned themselves, on immigration and integration issues. First, the two have been relatively homogenous in terms of ethnicity^v, partly due to the lack of a colonial past and partly due to being late starters as countries of immigration. Second, both countries have highly developed welfare systems which provide generous and tax-financed benefits based on the principle of universalism with access to benefits without prior labour market participation. This welfare-state is combined with a labour market where high minimum wages were meant to crowd out low-paid jobs in the private service sector which, in other countries, are exactly the type of jobs that would be open to low-skilled immigrants. This combination of high minimum wages, generous social benefits and high barriers of entry to the labour market have in many cases lead to migrants ending up with low labour market participation and high dependency on social benefits. Thus low-skilled immigration can be expected to add to, rather than alleviate, financial problems in universal welfare states like Denmark and Sweden (Nannestad, 2004). One noticeable difference is, however, the different share of immigrants in the population. In Denmark, the share of the population with a foreign background is 6.2% where the similar figure for Sweden is 10.9% (Green-Pedersen and Krogstrup, forthcoming 2007). Finally, with regard to public opinion there are some differences between the two countries but there are also many similarities. In both countries public opinion provide right-wing parties with an incentive for promoting a

restrictionist approach as it will be in line with the majority of the electorate (cf. Green-Pedersen and Krogstrup forthcoming 2007).

Immigration politics and policy in the 1970s and 1980s – expected similarities.

Since the 1970s, migration flows to Denmark and Sweden have consisted primarily of asylum-seekers and family reunification (Freeman, 1992; Gaasholt and Togeby, 1995). This was due to an official stop of labour migrant recruitment introduced in both countries in the early 1970s. The broad consensus in both countries on halting labour immigration was a consequence of the regulated labour market and the strong influence exercised by the trade unions. The strong opposition to further migration by the trade unions, especially in Sweden, related to the privileged employment position that labour migrants had compared to other countries which included the same social and economic rights as native workers which was said to be undermined by further, unregulated, labour migration (Geddes, 2003).

The ease with which immigration policy was altered in Sweden can be attributed to the strong corporatist arrangement prevailing at the time, i.e. the close relationship between the state, trade unions and employer federations and the emphasis on full employment. The famous Swedish model for integration (Soininen, 1999) was put in effect in the mid-1970s, having been preceded by an extensive governmental inquiry. This investigation proposed a new direction for the social, political and cultural status of migrants which, by international standards, was of a generous nature. The new guidelines put immigrants in a privileged position in terms of having access to rights and entitlements on par with Swedish nationals (Borevi, 2002). Although much praise has been given to the Swedish multicultural model (Castles and Miller, 2003), it was also subject to significant criticism and debate by scholars and political actors in Sweden (Pred, 2000; Ålund and Schierup, 1991). The reasons for this can be summarised as follows: a) perceived failure of

multicultural policies; b) increased socio-economic exclusion of foreign born residents and their descendents and c) stigmatising and stereotyping. However, issues relating to immigration and integration were up until the 1990s, characterised by a remarkable degree of cross-party consensus, explained in part by the stronghold of the Social Democrats, relatively low levels of immigration and high levels of labour market participation.

In Denmark, it was not until the early 1980s that immigration became a political issue at all (Hamburger, 1989). A key turning point came in 1983 when a broad majority in parliament, with the exception of the radical right-wing Progress Party, passed a new, and in many ways, more liberal immigration law. Possibilities of family unification were strengthened, asylum seekers achieved more rights and expulsion of foreigners became more difficult (Brøcker, 1990). In many ways, the debate on this more liberal immigration law, which had been prepared by an expert commission, continued along the lines of the 1970s discourse, but critical voices from the right-wing parties had become stronger. The Progress Party had strongly opposed existing policies since their entrance into parliament in 1973 and also launched a number of xenophobic campaigns. What was, perhaps, more remarkable was that the Conservative Minister of Justice, Mr. Erik Ninn Hansen, declared that the law would threaten Danish nationality. This declaration provoked strong reactions from the left-wing opposition (Jensen, 2000; Brøcker, 1990).

At the same time as the new law was implemented, an increasing number of refugees from the Middle East started to arrive in Denmark. This sparked a public debate where politicians from both the Conservatives and Liberals followed the critical immigration line introduced by the Minister of Justice (Jensen, 2000). The new position included a revision of the law which tightened the conditions for asylum in Denmark (Brøcker, 1990). In the end, the government managed to get their proposal passed in parliament relying on support from the Social Democrats, but without the support of the Social Liberals. After that, the issue more or less disappeared from the party political

agenda during the remainder of the bourgeois minority government (Green-Pedersen and Krogstrup, 2007 forthcoming).

The debate in the mid-1980s showed that politicians from both the Liberals and the Conservatives wanted their parties to change direction towards tighter immigration policies and an integration policy that was more demanding on immigrants. Nevertheless, the broad party consensus around immigration politics survived. The reason was the special character of Danish coalition politics on the right in this period. A parliamentary majority, including the Social Liberals, but not the government parties, existed in this period with regard to non-economic issues, especially foreign policy, justice and the environment (Damgaard and Svensson, 1989). A more restrictionist position of the Liberals and Conservatives was thus a political dead-end because it would have sharpened the already existing conflict with the Social Liberals and could have threatened government survival.

Although comparatively more prominent in Denmark, immigration could by the end of the 1980s still be considered to be a minor political issue and the right-wing parties were in both countries still part of the broad national consensus on the issue. Policies in both countries had, however, moved somewhat in a more restrictionist direction and the consensus had showed signs of cracking in Denmark.

The 1990s: Going different ways?

Compared to Denmark, Sweden was in this respect lagging behind. Immigration became a hot and contested political issue 'only' in 1991 when the surprise success of the populist and immigration sceptic party, New Democracy, brought immigration up on the agenda. Although New Democracy's success, as a party, was short-lived, the effects of their restrictive stance on

immigration can today be found in mainstream politics. The repercussions of their proposed policy changes were present in subsequent elections as well as in recent years' turn away from explicit multiculturalism. A telling example is the issue of language competency for naturalisation. In 1992, New Democracy proposed that knowledge of Swedish should be a requirement for migrants wishing to become Swedish citizens. Their proposal was at the time unsuccessful having been blocked by both Left and Right parties (Votering 58). However, in 1997 the Conservatives presented a very similar proposal which was subsequently picked up by the Liberal Party in their election campaign in 2002. The absorption of radical right policies and mainstreaming these are in Swedish politics symptomatic of how immigration and integration have gone from being a general welfare state concern, characterised by cross-party consensus, to being an issue used as a way of distinguishing and profiling parties.

This development had already gone one step further in Denmark where the incentives for making immigration a political issue had increased in the early 1990s and more particularly following the change of government in 1993. The Social Liberals now entered a coalition with the Social Democrats, the Christian Democrats and the Centre Democrats, the former having governed with the Liberals and Conservatives from 1982 to 1988. This new constellation put the parties in a very different situation compared to the 1980s, when they were in government. They now had no reason to avoid confrontation with the Social Liberals. Further, their major chance of getting back into government was to win a majority with the Progress Party which diminished the need for the parties to distance themselves from the xenophobic rhetoric of the latter.

From 1993, the Danish Conservatives, and especially the Liberals, started to change their policy positions quite dramatically with regard to both immigration and integration. The first sign of this came in 1994 during a debate about how to deal with the Bosnian asylum seekers. The government, supported by the left-wing parties, wanted to allow the Bosnians to be granted refugee

status. On the other hand, the right-wing opposition proposed temporary residence permits which meant repatriation to Bosnia once the war was over. The government was able to pass its proposal in parliament, but the debate showed that the right-wing parties had changed course and thus abandoned the consensus around the immigration issue (Jensen, 2000). In 1995, the Progress Party was splintered and the Danish People's Party emerged with the very popular leader, Pia Kjaersgaard. As mentioned above, the Progress Party had made immigration one of their key issues. The Danish People's Party focused almost exclusively on immigration and further appeared as a much more reliable party, both in the eyes of the electorate and as a coalition partner, compared to the Progress Party which had constantly been plagued by internal disagreements and its eccentric leader, Mogens Glistrup. Finally, the Danish People's Party was also very keen on distancing itself from any neo-Nazi groups and connections (Rydgren, 2005). In sum, the populist right became significantly stronger after the Danish People's Party had established itself in the Danish party system at the 1998 election when it won 7.4% of the vote.

The pattern of confrontation between the government and the right-wing opposition was sharpened further after the 1998 election. Anders Fogh Rasmussen, the new Liberal party leader, had previously been reluctant to focus on immigration issues, realised that immigration could become a central point in the strategy of the Liberals to win government power (Green-Pedersen and Krogstrup, 2007 forthcoming). Looking at the period from 1993 to 2001, the change in the position of, especially, the Liberals in Denmark is striking. In the party program from 1995, they still focused on the rights of immigrants to, for example, preserve their original culture (Venstre, 1995) whereas in 2006, the focus is on what Danish society should demand from immigrants both culturally and economically (Venstre, 2006). Another illuminating example was the question of naturalisation of immigrants. Until 1993, only the Progress Party had wanted to debate this law,

which had previously been passed in parliament without much controversy. However from 1993, the Liberals and Conservatives also started to debate this law (cf. Holm 2005: 93-113).

The developments in Sweden were generally different though with some similarities to Denmark. Although immigration and integration had been reasonably important issues for the electorate since the 1980s, they had not been crucial in determining party choice (Rydgren, 2002). The mainstream parties, and especially those on the centre-right, had furthermore been slow to respond to changes in voter preferences and had not actively pursued the more right-wing voters (Rydgren, 2005b). However, a turning point regarding the salience of immigration questions in Swedish politics and the stability of cross-party consensus on these issues came in the 1994 election. As in Denmark, the war in the Balkans had led to a dramatic increase of asylum applications which coincided with the Swedish economy trying to recover from the recession. These events prompted the election campaign to be dominated by questions of Sweden's commitment to refugee reception and, especially, the societal costs related to this type of migration. The change in issue preference can partly be attributed to the influence of New Democracy in shaping the agenda during the early 1990s and to the aggressive fashion in which they had pursued these issues. The question of whether to restrict asylum and refugee migration was a key element in the election campaign as well as in the political debate in 1994. Relatively less attention was paid to issues of racism, discrimination and socio-economic exclusion (Boreus, 2006). The avoidance by parties to address these issues is puzzling since, as Rydgren (2004b) points out, during the economic recession of the 1990s, Sweden had one of the highest levels of unemployment amongst non-European migrants within the OECD.

Following on from the increased political hostility towards immigration and perceived failure of the multicultural project, an expert committee was set up to formulate a new direction for Swedish integration policy. The 'politics of integration' presented in September 1997 put forward

some new guidelines for what had previously been considered ‘the politics of immigrants’. A distinguishing feature of these policies was a move away from the corporatist orientation of previous policies that considered ‘immigrants’ to be yet another type of social grouping in a similar vein to ‘labourers’ or ‘employers’. Instead, the new policy would focus more on the individual and her needs. Linguistically this change could be seen in the emphasis on ‘integration’ as opposed to ‘immigrants’ and a focus on providing equality of opportunities (Göransson, 2005).

This new deal also prompted the birth of the Swedish Integration Board (Integrationsverket, IV) which had ‘the overall responsibility for ensuring that the visions and goals of Sweden’s integration policies have an impact in different areas of society’ (Integrationsverket, 2007). An indication that immigration, yet again, was to be a hot political issue came prior to the 1998 election when a former employee of the Swedish Board of Immigration, Kenneth Sandberg, spoke out about the ‘disastrous situation’ that Sweden was in after decades of ‘mass immigration’ which generated intense media coverage. The relative open climate that had emerged, which allowed commentators to speak out in a covertly racist language, can again be attributed to the influence that New Democracy and its populist rhetoric had in the early 1990s (Rydgren, 2005). Although this new policy direction by and large corresponded to key centre-right ideas of individualism and equal opportunities, the Conservative Party responded to the, primarily, Social Democratic policy by issuing a distinctly more radical proposal in time for the 1998 election. The rhetoric of the far-right had been absorbed and mainstreamed into the Conservative’s party manifesto of 1997, *Land for Hoppfulla* (Land of the hopeful). This was one of the first manifestos by a mainstream party to directly address ‘the problems of immigration’ and the Conservatives had picked up on anti-immigrant sentiments among the electorate as well as the burgeoning support for radical right parties. However, the manifesto was heavily criticised for legitimising this type of far-right discourse seeing that the manifesto implicitly blamed immigrants for their high levels of welfare

dependency and their 'failure' to integrate. Less publicised, but just as controversial, was the Conservative's proposal of re-opening the borders for labour migration in order to remedy skill shortages in certain sectors.

This new fertile political environment did also allow the populist and right-wing Sweden Democrats to re-mobilise. After shedding their connections with Neo-Nazi and other far-right groups they increased their electoral support and eventually gained seats in eight localities (Ekman and Larsson, 2001). Their success can be explained by how the debate on asylum and refugees had shifted towards criticising the Social-Democrats spending on settled refugees and whether the various integration projects were producing any beneficial results.

In Denmark, the period up until 2001 was a constant battle between the bourgeois opposition - the Liberals and the Conservatives – and the centre-left government. By accepting some tightening of immigration and asylum rules and some tougher integration measures, the government tried to close down the issue as a major point of political conflict. However, the bourgeois opposition was very successful at turning immigration into a crucial – if not the dominant issue - in the 2001 election campaign. The politicization of the issue was thus a major reason for the bourgeois victory and consequent government take over in 2001 (Andersen, 2003). The election in 2001 allowed the Conservatives and the Liberals to form a coalition which could rule with support from the Danish People's Party. The need to avoid open conflict with the Social Liberals, which had constrained the two parties in the 1980s, was no longer present and the policy measures which the two parties had advocated in opposition could now be implemented. The policy measures related to both immigration and integration issues. With regard to immigration, the possibilities of family unification were tightened significantly. Family unification before the age of 24 became virtually impossible and married couples had to document a closer connection to Denmark than to the homeland of the person not already living in Denmark. The rules for family unification thus became

much tougher compared to other European countries (Tænketanken, 2004). With regard to integration, the central idea had been that labour market participation was the best way to integrate immigrants. In terms of policy instruments, focus had been on securing economic incentives for immigrants to take a job which corresponded with the more general transformations of Danish labour market policy. However, the Danish system provided fairly generous social assistance scheme in which the actual net gain from working, compared to receiving social benefits, can sometimes be quite limited. A central measure was the introduction of a special level of social assistance for non-EU migrants which was considerably below the normal level and was intended to serve as an incentive for immigrants to accept low paid jobs. These policy measures can be seen as the culmination of the Danish right's transformation of immigration and integration policy which took place after the change of government in 1993 and which has brought the parties fairly close to the position of the Danish People's Party.

Although questions of immigration and integration had been prominent in previous Swedish elections, the 2002 election was significant for how the centre-right chose to utilise immigration and integration as a profiling tool. Ljunggren (2003) points to two particular circumstances that enabled immigration to become one of the key election issues. First, as a way of pre-empting the Sweden Democrats to monopolise the issue. The Sweden Democrats had closely monitored the success of the Danish People's Party and adopted a number of their tactics and policies which caused concern for the mainstream parties. Second, immigration, and especially criticising the ruling Social Democratic bloc for incompetence in this area, served as an effective tool for profiling the centre-right parties. It also provided opportunities for the Liberal Party to put forward the issue of language tests as a requirement for naturalisation. Although the proposal came under heavy fire by Social Democratic rhetoric of equality and solidarity, it nevertheless corresponded, in parts, to the new integration directives from 1997. A key component of these policies suggested that integration

should be the responsibility of the entire population, not just the receiving society. This indicated a significant shift towards the right when emphasising the duties and responsibilities that migrants had and should adhere to if they wanted to integrate successfully. Although heavily criticised for being populist and fishing for the Far-Right vote, the Liberal Party were not opposed to Sweden's asylum and refugee policy as such and were also in favour of a more flexible immigration system which allowed for future labour migration (Bale, 2003).

The open attitude towards labour immigration was a continuation of what the Conservatives had suggested already in their 1997 manifesto and set the centre-right block apart from the Left and the trade unions' view that labour migration should continue to be restricted. The centre-right also took the opportunity to further criticise the Left in general and the Social Democrats in particular for having pursued a politics of integration which in many ways had 'failed'. A particular point was made regarding the high levels of unemployment, overrepresentation in criminal statistics and poor performance in schools by migrants and their descendents (Boréus, 2006). Similarly, the revamped and sanitised Sweden Democrats used immigration as profiling tool and focused their campaign on very much emphasising the perceived differences between 'Swedes' and 'immigrants' but with the novel approach of pointing out the cultural clashes that migration, and especially Islamic migration, gave rise to rather than using the traditional far-right discourse of race (Aress and Diaz, 2006). The relative success that the Sweden Democrats had in the 2006 election can be traced back to how salient integration and immigration issues were for the mainstream parties. In contrast to previous elections, immigration and integration issues were not as prominent in the 2006 election. Although immigration, and especially integration, figured frequently in the public debate, these issues were somewhat overshadowed by the unexpected agreement between the centre-right alliance ('Alliance for Sweden') on a number of policies (growth, education, foreign policy, the welfare state, the labour market and justice) thus making them a serious competitor for being in government (Aylott

and Bolin, 2007). Furthermore, the Conservatives had learned from the 1998 election and adjusted their rhetoric to once again frame integration in a general and ideology compatible language. Consequently, immigration and integration slipped down the priority list. The Alliances' manifestos were indicative of these changes with immigration and integration policies being vaguely formulated and appearing towards the end of the party manifestos. The proposed solutions to 'integration failures' did, by and large, correspond to the ideological positioning of the parties. The Conservative's manifesto, for example, suggested that integration is a matter best dealt with by the labour market and consequently the barriers for participation in this area were to be removed (www.moderaterna.se), a view which was supported by the Centre Party (www.centerpartiet.se). In a similar vein, the Liberal Party identified unequal access to the labour market as a key problem but went one step further by also emphasising that migrants have duties as well as rights (www.folkpartiet.se)^{vi}. The lack of a clear cross-party strategy on how to confront far-right opponents, in combination with immigration and integration issues receiving a low priority, thus played in favour of the Sweden Democrats who managed to carve out a clear party profile in the 2006 election. (Aylott and Brolin, 2007). However, the shift in government structure in the 2006 election also marked a number of significant changes in terms of the Swedish approach to immigration and integration. Nyamko Sabuni, a Liberal Party member, was appointed as minister for integration and gender equality. Sabuni established herself as an important figure in the integration debate by quickly implementing the closing down of the Swedish Integration Board, a plan that had been hatched by the Alliance in the years running up the 2006 election. The significance of this act should not be overlooked since it marks a clear disengagement from the Swedish model. Nevertheless it was passed with remarkably little debate and controversy, although the Social Democrats and the Left Party criticised the decision for not being properly thought

through. Further changes included emphasising the importance of Swedish language education, combating discrimination and providing equal opportunities on the labour market.

Conclusion

The development of immigration politics in Denmark and Sweden since the 1990s show surprising degrees of divergence given the similarities in societal context. In Denmark, the considerable changes in a more restrictive direction, which resulted from the politicization of the issue after the change of government in 1993, remains in place even though political attention to the immigration issue has cooled down somewhat since 2001. In fact, a new party consensus around these restrictive changes has emerged in Denmark as the Social Democrats have largely accepted them in an attempt to downplay the role of the immigration issue in Danish politics (see Bale *et al.* 2007).

The Swedish centre-right parties have not made the same considerable move in a restrictionist direction. For example, the Danish decision to restrict the immigration of dependents by raising the age limit for family reunification to 24 was viewed with scepticism in Sweden and there was no equivalent policy position by the Swedish right. The furthest move in a restrictionist direction is exemplified by the Conservative position up to the 1998 election, but even that contained a suggestion to re-open the borders for labour market integration. Such a liberal element is not found in the positions of Danish right-wing parties in the 1990s. Further, the Swedish Conservatives more or less gave up this partial move in a Danish direction before the 2006 election to secure the coherence of the “Alliance” with the centre-right parties.

It is important, however, not to misinterpret this lack of movement as an indication of Swedish immigration politics today being largely similar to that of the 1980s. Sweden has in fact moved away from cross-party consensus on integration to a somewhat more polarised situation between the centre-right and the left blocs. Consequently, the Swedish model of integration has

undergone extensive restructuring. However, the disagreement between the left and right in Sweden revolves mainly around whether the welfare state or the market is the most effective tool for reducing socio-economic exclusion. It is much less about the right wanting a more restrictionist immigration policy as in Denmark.

The argument of this paper suggests that the difference in right-wing positions in the 1990s and the differences in immigration politics which this has led to should be explained by differences in coalition politics of the right-wing bloc. In Denmark, the change of side of the Social Liberals in 1993 which led to a change of government implied that the major parties of the right – the Liberals and Conservatives - now had no incentive to avoid confrontation with the Social Liberals over the immigration issue. This was what had kept them from turning in a more restrictionist direction in the 1980s. During the 1990s, the two parties turned steadily more restrictionist as part of a very successful strategy to politicize the issue. This politicization, which also involved cooperation with the radical right, led to a much more restrictionist policy in Denmark with regard to both immigration and integration (Green-Pedersen and Krogstrup, forthcoming)

In Sweden, a similar move by the Conservatives would be dangerous because it would damage the possibilities of the Swedish right-wing bloc to present themselves as a united alternative to the Social Democrats. The u-turn of the Swedish Conservatives in the direction of the traditional consensus around immigration politics before the 2006 election illustrates exactly this. The u-turn was necessary to establish the right-wing “Alliance”, which in the end won power. The increased polarization between the left and right on integration policies fits well with the coalition politics of the right because it corresponds to the classic class conflict cleavage which has been the main divider in Swedish society.

The experiences in Sweden and Denmark clearly show that analyzing the positions of the centre right is crucial for understanding immigration politics and thus clearly confirms the

central argument of this special issue. Further, by stressing the importance of the centre right, and not the radical right, this article also argues that the tendency of the literature to focus on radical right-wing parties with regard to immigration and integration is problematic (see Bale in this issue). At least, the role of radical right-wing parties has to be seen in connection with the question of coalition politics of the entire right-wing bloc (cf. also Bale 2003). Radical right-wing parties have played a much stronger role in Danish politics, but as presented above, this difference only became important as part of Danish coalition politics on the right-wing during the 1990s. The presence of the Progress Party with partly xenophobic rhetoric during the 1980s did not cause a break with the overall party consensus and is thus a divergence from the Swedish situation. That only happened after 1993 when the coalition incentives of the centre right in Denmark changed

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Notes:

ⁱ To make presentation easier, immigration politics in the following refers to both immigrations and integration.

ⁱⁱ More detailed introduction to the right-wing parties in Scandinavia and their development can be found in Arter (1999).

ⁱⁱⁱ In 1973, two other small centre-right wing parties, the Center Democrats and the Christian People's party also gained representation, which they however, have lost in recent years.

^{iv} It's worth noting that the Swedish liberals are much more of a centre right-wing party than the Liberals in Denmark and as such are in many ways more similar to the Danish Social Liberals.

^v Although both countries have had linguistic minorities for centuries (Finnish and Saami communities in Sweden and the small German minority in southern Denmark), these have been subject to strong processes of assimilation of the years and have only recently been recognised as national minorities.

^{vi} In comparison, the Social Democrats also point to the importance of the labour market but phrase this in traditional social democratic language of equality and inclusion (www.socialdemokraterna.se). The Left Party's manifesto, on the other hand, only mentions immigration and integration indirectly when pointing to that the party favours a generous interpretation of the right to asylum. The Green Party's manifesto contains a vague paragraph on the multicultural society's benefits but this is, on the other hand, complemented with a very detailed list of policy proposals on their webpage. The Greens are also, somewhat surprising perhaps, in favour of free immigration (www.mp.se) as well as a generous asylum and refugee policy.